

§ 331.4

33 CFR Ch. II (7–1–06 Edition)

engineer may exercise the authority at 33 CFR 325.8(c) to elevate any permit application, and subsequently make the final permit decision. In such a case, any appeal process of the district engineer's initial decision is terminated. If a particular permit application is elevated to the division engineer pursuant to 33 CFR 325.8(c), and the division engineer's decision on the permit application is a permit denial or results in a declined permit, that permit denial or declined permit would be subject to an administrative appeal to the Chief of Engineers.

(3) *Qualifications.* The RO will be a Corps employee with extensive knowledge of the Corps regulatory program. Where the permit decision being appealed was made by the division engineer or higher authority, a Corps official at least one level higher than the decision maker shall make the decision on the merits of the RFA, and this Corps official shall appoint a qualified individual as the RO to conduct the appeal process.

(b) *General*—(1) *Independence.* The RO will not perform, or have been involved with, the preparation, review, or decision making of the action being appealed. The RO will be independent and impartial in reviewing any appeal, and when assisting the division engineer to make a decision on the merits of the appeal.

(2) *Review.* The RO will conduct an independent review of the administrative record to address the reasons for the appeal cited by the applicant in the RFA. In addition, to the extent that it is practicable and feasible, the RO will also conduct an independent review of the administrative record to verify that the record provides an adequate and reasonable basis supporting the district engineer's decision, that facts or analysis essential to the district engineer's decision have not been omitted from the administrative record, and that all relevant requirements of law, regulations, and officially promulgated Corps policy guidance have been satisfied. Should the RO require expert advice regarding any subject, he may seek such advice from any employee of the Corps or of another Federal or state agency, or from any recognized expert, so long as that person had not

been previously involved in the action under review.

§ 331.4 Notification of appealable actions.

Affected parties will be notified in writing of a Corps decision on those activities that are eligible for an appeal. For approved JDs, the notification must include an NAP fact sheet, an RFA form, and a basis of JD. For permit denials, the notification must include a copy of the decision document for the permit application, an NAP fact sheet and an RFA form. For proffered individual permits, when the initial proffered permit is sent to the applicant, the notification must include an NAO fact sheet. For declined permits (*i.e.*, proffered individual permits that the applicant refuses to accept and sends back to the Corps), the notification must include an NAP fact sheet and an RFA form. Additionally, an affected party has the right to obtain a copy of the administrative record.

§ 331.5 Criteria.

(a) *Criteria for appeal*—(1) *Submission of RFA.* The appellant must submit a completed RFA (as defined at § 331.2) to the appropriate division office in order to appeal an approved JD, a permit denial, or a declined permit. An individual permit that has been signed by the applicant, and subsequently unilaterally modified by the district engineer pursuant to 33 CFR 325.7, may be appealed under this process, provided that the applicant has not started work in waters of the United States authorized by the permit. The RFA must be received by the division engineer within 60 days of the date of the NAP.

(2) *Reasons for appeal.* The reason(s) for requesting an appeal of an approved JD, a permit denial, or a declined permit must be specifically stated in the RFA and must be more than a simple request for appeal because the affected party did not like the approved JD, permit decision, or the permit conditions. Examples of reasons for appeals include, but are not limited to, the following: A procedural error; an incorrect application of law, regulation or officially promulgated policy; omission of material fact; incorrect application of the current regulatory criteria and

associated guidance for identifying and delineating wetlands; incorrect application of the Section 404(b)(1) Guidelines (see 40 CFR Part 230); or use of incorrect data. The reasons for appealing a permit denial or a declined permit may include jurisdiction issues, whether or not a previous approved JD was appealed.

(b) *Actions not appealable.* An action or decision is not subject to an administrative appeal under this part if it falls into one or more of the following categories:

(1) An individual permit decision (including a letter of permission or a standard permit with special conditions), where the permit has been accepted and signed by the permittee. By signing the permit, the applicant waives all rights to appeal the terms and conditions of the permit, unless the authorized work has not started in waters of the United States and that issued permit is subsequently modified by the district engineer pursuant to 33 CFR 325.7;

(2) Any site-specific matter that has been the subject of a final decision of the Federal courts;

(3) A final Corps decision that has resulted from additional analysis and evaluation, as directed by a final appeal decision;

(4) A permit denial without prejudice or a declined permit, where the controlling factor cannot be changed by the Corps decision maker (e.g., the requirements of a binding statute, regulation, state Section 401 water quality certification, state coastal zone management disapproval, etc. (See 33 CFR 320.4(j)));

(5) A permit denial case where the applicant has subsequently modified the proposed project, because this would constitute an amended application that would require a new public interest review, rather than an appeal of the existing record and decision;

(6) Any request for the appeal of an approved JD, a denied permit, or a declined permit where the RFA has not been received by the division engineer within 60 days of the date of the NAP;

(7) A previously approved JD that has been superceded by another approved JD based on new information or data

submitted by the applicant. The new approved JD is an appealable action;

(8) An approved JD associated with an individual permit where the permit has been accepted and signed by the permittee;

(9) A preliminary JD; or

(10) A JD associated with unauthorized activities except as provided in § 331.11.

§ 331.6 Filing an appeal.

(a) An affected party appealing an approved JD, permit denial or declined permit must submit an RFA that is received by the division engineer within 60 days of the date of the NAP. Flow charts illustrating the appeal process are in the Appendices of this part.

(b) In the case where an applicant objects to an initial proffered individual permit, the appeal process proceeds as follows. To initiate the appeal process regarding the terms and special conditions of the permit, the applicant must write a letter to the district engineer explaining his objections to the permit. The district engineer, upon evaluation of the applicant's objections, may: Modify the permit to address all of the applicant's objections or modify the permit to address some, but not all, of the applicant's objections, or not modify the permit, having determined that the permit should be issued as previously written. In the event that the district engineer agrees to modify the initial proffered individual permit to address all of the applicant's objections, the district engineer will proffer such modified permit to the applicant, enclosing an NAP fact sheet and an RFA form as well. Should the district engineer modify the initial proffered individual permit to address some, but not all, of the applicant's objections, the district engineer will proffer such modified permit to the applicant, enclosing an NAP fact sheet, RFA form, and a copy of the decision document for the project. If the district engineer does not modify the initial proffered individual permit, the district engineer will proffer the unmodified permit to the applicant a second time, enclosing an NAP fact sheet, an RFA form, and a copy of the decision document. If the applicant still has objections, after receiving the second proffered permit